

Global Political Thought  
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## **Iqbal's Notion of an 'Islamic Modernity'**

### **Introduction:**

This study seeks to explore Muhammad Iqbal's particular conception of an 'Islamic modernity' and understand its implications for Muslim societies. It aims to highlight Iqbal's vision of Islam as a modern postcolonial religion and his notion of the 'principle of movement' in Islam which informs his distinctive critique of Islamic modernism. The paper tries to throw light on Iqbal's intellectual engagement with the West and briefly reviews the way in which Iqbal's political thought coincided and diverged with that of his contemporaries in South Asia. This paper underlines Iqbal's rejection of both secularism and traditionalism in Islam. This seemingly contradictory position is interesting to study in the Islamic context because modernity and secularism are considered to be mutually contiguous and complementary phenomenon. This paper attempts to underscore the clear distinction between modernity and secularism, as highlighted through Iqbal's work. It also argues that this ostensibly paradoxical understanding of modernity beleaguers the impact of Iqbal's thought and in many ways obstructs its articulation in the Muslim societies.

### **Iqbal and Modernity:**

Iqbal's thought is particularly relevant to study today because he seems to have explored the tensions between Islamic tradition, secularism and modernity at a more profound level than any other Muslim thinkers of his time. Iqbal saw modernity, not

just as a useful value but as '*a practical necessity*' and a '*moral imperative*'. Iqbal considered modernity to be the '*internal movement of a society*' responding to the '*pressure of modern ideas*'.<sup>1</sup> Consequently his notion of modernity is that which mirrors the aspirations of the society. For him modernity did not mean a clean break with past tradition or conversely as conformation with Western values, but simply as the '*enlargement of human freedom*'. Iqbal believed in an '*attitude of modernity*' which he believed was imperative for '*a reading of history that would reconstitute it's intention*', adapting itself according to '*the conditions and demands of the present while continuing to open the future by always further increasing the freedom of each and all*'.<sup>2</sup> Modernity for Iqbal thus meant being in charge of oneself, individually and collectively.

In the context of Islam, Iqbal upheld the vision of a modernity that was quintessentially Islamic in it's nature. Iqbal imagined a post-colonial Muslim community, globally and specifically within South Asia, which had a distinct 'Islamicized identity'.<sup>3</sup> For Iqbal, Islam is a social structure regulated by a dynamic legal system and animated by a specific '*ethical ideal*' which unifies '*scattered individuals and groups, transforming them into a well defined people, possessing a moral consciousness of their own*'.<sup>4</sup> This sociological vision of an Islamic community maintained a rejection of the distinction between class, race, caste, tribe or ethnicity. Iqbal attempted to define Islam against these categories which according to him '*counteract the humanizing work of Islam*'. It is for this reason that Iqbal held a disdain for the Muslim *ashraf* culture in the subcontinent, because it led to

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<sup>1</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'.

<sup>2</sup> Diagne, S.B. 'Islam and Open Society Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal'.

<sup>3</sup> Singh, Iqbal. 'The Ardent Pilgrim'. Oxford University Press. 1997

<sup>4</sup> Tariq, A.R. ed. 'Speeches and Statements of Iqbal'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

the stratification of the Muslim community.<sup>5</sup> Iqbal describes Islam as '*a social experiment*' which provides '*a model for the final combination of humanity by drawing it's adherents from a variety of races, and then transforming this atomic aggregate into a people possessing a self consciousness of their own*'.<sup>6</sup>

Iqbal articulated a vision of the '*resurgence*' of Islam in the modern world, reflecting the nexus between past, present and future. In this sense he recast Islam as a '*universalizing postcolonial religion*', which was rooted in a '*reconstructed*' and '*self-reflexive*' faith. He alludes to the '*delicate*' problem of balancing modern reform with the force of conservatism within Islam, so as not to reject the past totally, saying '*In any view of social change the value and function of the forces of conservatism cannot be lost sight of*'.<sup>7</sup> In Iqbal's view of modernity, both tradition and innovation sustain each other. Iqbal underlines the '*uncertainty*' of the modern moment with his depiction of Muhammad as standing '*between the ancient and the modern world*' where '*the source of his revelation is grounded in the ancient world and it's spirit belongs to the modern world*'.<sup>8</sup> Iqbal sought inspiration from the classical Islamic sources and learnt how to be faithful to them in a novel way. In this context he returns to the advent of Islam itself and equates it with novelty and the possibility of '*measured articulation*', saying '*we were a word unvoiced in the world*' which went on to become '*a measured verse*'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Majeed, Javed , 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Institute of Islamic Culture.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Iqbal, Muhammed. 'Stray Reflections'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

<sup>9</sup> Asrar-e-Khudi. Secrets of the Self. 1964.

Throughout Iqbal's work there is an interplay between ruination and reconstruction , placed in the context of Islam's past power, its contemporary decline and a possible future resurgence. Using the framework of 'rupture' and 'continuity' in his work, Iqbal highlights the interrelation between the old and new. In a very innovative way, he enacts his rupture from the tradition by incorporating it in his work and transforming it through it's 'politicization'.<sup>10</sup> Iqbal politicized Islam through an 'Islamist postcolonial agency' which dealt with not only issues of social justice, legitimate power and ethical life within Islam but also challenged the hegemony of Western political and cultural norms. For him such innovation brought together a refashioned Islam with a 'newly defined political aesthetic'.<sup>11</sup>

While Iqbal's work is grounded in tradition, his stress on 'novelty', 'dynamism' and 'movement' is in a stark contrast to the fixed landscapes of classical Muslim poets and thinkers. Images of powerful motion and dynamism are representative of Iqbal's poetic landscapes such as his depictions of the '*free flowing river*', '*leaping streams*' and '*fast moving torrents*'.<sup>12</sup> In a sense these images become textual narratives in Iqbal's imaginary geography that relate the onward flow of time, juxtaposed with Islam's past. Even his symbolism has multiple, interleaving layers in which beginnings and endings are dexterously intertwined. By contrast Iqbal uses words like '*frozen*', '*barren*' and '*congealed*' to describe the aesthetics of traditional poets and thinkers as symbolizing '*oppressed people who perpetuate habits of servitude*'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Majeed, Javed , 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Arberry, Arthur. J. *Javid Nama*.1966, Dar , Bashir Ahmad. *Iqbal's Gulshan-i-Raz-i-Jadid and Bandagi Nama*.

<sup>13</sup> Arberry, Arthur J. *Zabur-e-Ajam*. Persian Psalms. 1961.

### **The Principle of Movement in Islam:**

In this sense Iqbal made his greatest contribution to the 'renaissance' of Islam by maintaining that it was not bound by '*voluntary surrender of intellectual independence*'.<sup>14</sup> Iqbal denounced what he called the '*retrospective stubbornness*' of the traditionalist outlook in Islam and characterizes those who blindly follow the '*words of the ancestors*' as '*ignorant*' and '*limited*'. In contrast he urged Muslims to break away from tradition and emphasised the '*historical optimism*' in Islam which '*turns us away from an exclusive attachment to the things that come to us from our fathers*'<sup>15</sup> saying ,

*How good it would be for man with a free step*

*To go, unfettered by the chains of the past!*

*If imitation were a good thing,*

*The Prophet would himself have also followed*

*the path of his forebears.*<sup>16</sup>

In this regard Iqbal underlined the importance of the concept of *ijtihad*, which he describes as '*the principle of movement in the structure of Islam*'.<sup>17</sup> Through the process of *ijtihad* Iqbal sought to rediscover and re-interpret the foundational Islamic legal principles, '*in the light of experience and the altered conditions of modern life*'. In Iqbal's opinion, neglect of *ijtihad* was one of the main reasons leading to the decline of the Muslim people, for '*in an over-organized society the individual is altogether crushed out of*

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<sup>14</sup> Iqbal, Muhammed. 'Stray Reflections'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

<sup>15</sup> Diagne, S.B. 'Islam and Open Society Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal'.

<sup>16</sup> Hussain , M. Hadi. *Payam-e-Mashriq*. (Message of the East). 1971

<sup>17</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Institute of Islamic Culture.

existence.<sup>18</sup> What was needed was the resurrection of the spirit of independent thinking so that '*self concentrated individuals*' could come into being to '*disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision*'. For Iqbal the rediscovery of Islam's past was necessary, but only with a view to providing it with a rationale in terms of the present. He also believed that '*a false reverence for past history and it's artificial resurrection constitutes no remedy for a people's decay*'.<sup>19</sup>

Iqbal believed in revolution, but he wanted change to happen from '*within the framework of existing social order*'.<sup>20</sup> Even as he sought to re-introduce the age old concepts of wisdom like *ijtihad*, he revitalized and re-phrased quotidian, everyday rituals like prayers in the language of revolution as a means of infinitely higher ends in the grand narrative of life. Iqbal regards prayer as instinctive in origin and believes that prayer is an '*expression of the Man's inner yearning for a response to the awful silence of the universe*'.<sup>21</sup> While the routine of the mechanical living atrophies the freedom of the human soul and decreases it's awareness of deeper Reality, the prayer leads to liberty because it restores 'self-possession' to the Self, which gives Man the opportunity to change himself and consequently change the world. In *Zarb-e-Kalim* he says,

*Your prayer cannot change the Order of the Universe,*

*but it is possible that praying will alter your being;*

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<sup>18</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Institute of Islamic Culture.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Iqbal, Muhammed. 'Stray Reflections'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Iqbal. *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore. 1930.

*if there is a revolution in your inner Self it will not be strange, then ,*

*if the whole world changes too.*

Iqbal underlined the Quranic belief which upheld life as a process of progressive creation, which necessitated that '*each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of it's predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems*'.<sup>22</sup> It is by knowing how to go back to Islamic history and scriptural Islam to look for answers to understand the '*process of civilization*' that it signified. According to Iqbal, scriptural religion can '*respond meaningfully to the challenges of modernity*' and is not confounded by radical, historical change but infact offers itself as a 'guide' for communities and societies facing upheaval. For Iqbal ,

*'Reality lives in its own appearances; and such a being as man, who has to maintain his life in an obstructing environment, cannot afford to ignore the visible. The Quran opens our eyes to the great fact of change, through the appreciation and control of which alone it is possible to build a durable civilization.'* <sup>23</sup>

Iqbal's call for Islamic societies to move with the advances of civilization, was not an appeal to conform with the Western civilization or with the Western conception of modernity but to understand it's challenges and overcome them by creating their own particular version of modernity. In this regard the Quran becomes a point of reference Iqbal for with its '*dynamic conception of the universe*'.<sup>24</sup> For Iqbal, the Quran also provides

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<sup>22</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Institute of Islamic Culture.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

instruction for mending a 'divided' world without dividing oneself from the present world.

### **Iqbal's Intellectual Engagement with the West :**

The main outcome of Iqbal's intellectual engagement with the West seemed to be that the boundaries between Islam and the West remain 'unclear' and 'porous'. Iqbal attempted to bring Islam and the West together in a global narrative, saying that '*Islam ought to act as a kind of intermediary between the East and the West..... lying midway between Asia and Europe and being a synthesis of Eastern and Western outlooks on life*'.<sup>25</sup> In a way Iqbal sought to reconcile and validate earlier Islamic thought with and through modern European thought and science. Iqbal further believed that the '*European culture on its intellectual side is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam*'.<sup>26</sup> In this sense Iqbal's work has been seen as a possible landmark, in which Islam and West can be considered, not as oppositional or contradictory discourses but ones which have overlapping concerns. In the Javednama, Iqbal goes beyond the oppositional categories of East and West saying,

*'Abandon the East, be not spellbound by the West,*

*for all this ancient and new is not worth one barleycorn'.*

In Iqbal's 'cosmopolitan eclecticism', modernity does not correspond to the world of dimensions.<sup>27</sup> Iqbal uses East and West as discursive terms not signifying opposing

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<sup>25</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Institute of Islamic Culture

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Majeed, Javed , 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Routledge



civilizations and cultures but those which just reflect different ways of being in the world, saying,

*'Though it is out of the East that the sun rises,  
showing itself bold and bright, without a veil,  
only then it burns and blazes with inward fire,  
when it escapes from the shackles of East and West.'*<sup>28</sup>

However as a postcolonial intellectual, Iqbal also seemed cognizant of the possibilities of reconciling the Western and Islamic thought being subverted by Western dominance. In Iqbal's opinion there was an 'asymmetry' between the intellectual engagement of Muslim thinkers with the West where there was 'an absence of reciprocal engagement' on the part of the Western intelligentsia.<sup>29</sup> This resistance to a reciprocal intellectual relationship was, in Iqbal's analysis, because the absolute '*otherness of Islam*' was less threatening to the West than '*the fearful possibilities of it's sameness*'.<sup>30</sup> It was possibly for this reason that Iqbal had presciently asked in 1936, '*But what if the follies of Europe create an irreconcilable Islam?*'. He foresaw a radical transformation towards Islam that was created by the dictates of '*imperial ambition*' and '*economic exploitation*' rather than common concern.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Iqbal could never accept the notion of secularism that the West seemed insistent upon exporting to the East.

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<sup>28</sup> Arberry, Arthur. J. *Javid Nama*, 1966, Dar , Bashir Ahmad

<sup>29</sup> Majeed, Javed , 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Routledge

<sup>30</sup> Tariq, A.R. ed. 'Speeches and Statements of Iqbal'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

### Iqbal's Conception of Secularism:

Iqbal largely dismissed secularism as a '*non-question*' because for him secularism in Islam was an '*impossible phenomenon*'. Iqbal believed that '*religion is a matter of utmost importance in the lives of individuals as well as states*'.<sup>32</sup> Iqbal did not believe in the division of '*the unity of man into irreconcilable duality of spirit and matter*' and sees them as being '*organic to each other*'.<sup>33</sup> For him Islam was a system of life and conduct, because of which it is not possible to retain Islam as an ethical ideal and to reject it as a polity. He believed that in Islam the spiritual and temporal are not two distinct domains but that '*it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another*'.<sup>34</sup> Iqbal also believed that, '*If religion is separated from politics, the latter becomes mere tyranny*'.<sup>35</sup> For Iqbal there is not such thing as a profane world and he asserted that the secular was encompassed by the sacred because '*all is holy ground*' and that the entire earth was '*the confines of our mosque*'.<sup>36</sup>

Although secularization was built into an ideology of progress, Iqbal believed that secularism inadvertently allowed for the marginalization and perversion of religious faith. Iqbal believed that the secular settlement, '*the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious symbols and institutions*'<sup>37</sup> robbed the religious identities of their legitimacy. Iqbal asserted that Western secularism must take into account the '*religious modernities*' that exist as sociological facts in the world. He

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<sup>32</sup> Iqbal, Presidential Address. in Tariq, A.R. ed. 'Speeches and Statements of Iqbal'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

<sup>33</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. Institute of Islamic Culture

<sup>34</sup> Iqbal, Presidential Address. in Tariq, A.R. ed. 'Speeches and Statements of Iqbal'. Ghulam Ali and Sons. 1973

<sup>35</sup> Siddiqui, Naeem. *Bal-e-Jibril*, Gabriel's Wing. 1935

<sup>36</sup> Arberry, Arthur J. *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*. Mysteries of Selflessness: A Philosophical Poem. 1953.

<sup>37</sup> Madan, T.N. Secularism and its Place. The Journal of Asian Studies. 46, 4

also stressed the importance of analyzing the role of religion in a '*globalized modernity*'. Furthermore Iqbal asserted that secularism would create 'an immediate present' which the Muslims would find hard to survive and also that secularism would lead to radical extremism which it was incapable of countering.<sup>38</sup> Iqbal stressed on the importance of religion in the lives of the people of South Asia, where their place in their society was established by religion which bestowed meaning to their lives more than the society and culture.<sup>39</sup>

This viewpoint was also shared by Gandhi, who despite key differences with Iqbal, believed in the need to 'reconstitute religion in the modern world as a viable alternative to and as a critique of, a secularising modernity'.<sup>40</sup> Gandhi also emphasized the inseparability of the religion and politics, and considered religion to be the 'absolute constitutive force' behind social life. Gandhi upheld religion to be 'superior' to politics, saying that 'those who say religions has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means'.<sup>41</sup> But unlike Iqbal, Gandhi believed in the separation of religion and politics, where in his view it was the state's responsibility 'to ensure that every religion was free to develop its own genius', but that any religion which 'depended on state support did not deserve to survive'. Gandhi further believed that the Indian society could be built on 'a community of religions'.<sup>42</sup> But Iqbal saw this notion as problematic because it was built on '*the fiction of a secular homogenizing nationalism*' which wrongly assumed that a 'universal amalgamation of communities' could take place in India. Such

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<sup>38</sup> Majeed, Javed , 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Routledge

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Gandhi, M.K. 'Hind Swaraj', Promilla & Co. 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

nationalism was unfeasible for Iqbal because it meant for each individual to give up on their communal group or identity, which was the source of their social life and 'a living operative factor' in their consciousness.

In contrast to the arguments above, Nehru considered religion to be an 'erraneous view of the cosmos' that could not yield to any rational understanding.<sup>43</sup> While Nehru was an ardent believer in secularism which recognized individuals not groups, for Iqbal religion was not a private matter or a matter of individual experience. For Iqbal, '*In God the individual, in him the community lives.*'<sup>44</sup> Underlining the bond between individual (*fard*) and the community (*millat*), Iqbal asserts that the individual Self can only articulate itself, if it is structured by the community because the individual and the community are complementary entities which mirror each other. He even describes the relationship between the individual and community as being '*strings on one lute of the same concord*'<sup>45</sup>.

### **Modernity vs Secularism and Traditionalism**

What Iqbal then offers is an approach that rejects secularism and traditionalism altogether and is grounded in Iqbals' conception of modernism. Iqbal argues that a modern life need not be detached from religious faith and infact should be informed by it and that more modernity did not mean less religion. The interplay between tradition and innovation , gestures towards the way in which this innovation brings together a

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<sup>43</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. " The Moment of Arrival: Nehru and the Passive Revolution".

<sup>44</sup> Arberry, A.J. '*Rumuz-e Bekhuddi*'. Mysteries of Selflessness: A Philosophical Poem.1953

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

'refashioned' Islam with a newly 'defined political aesthetic'.<sup>46</sup> Iqbal focused his spiritual philosophy towards a political purpose, using it as a tool for the moral reform of the Muslim world and specially for the uplift of the Muslims in colonial South Asia. With this message Iqbal sought to 'reawaken' the Muslims of the sub-continent from their soporific interia by creating 'a fresh world of ideals', his aim being to 'lead home the wanderer, imbue the idle looker on with restless impatience, a new quest, a new spirit'.<sup>47</sup>

Iqbal's Islamic modernism plays a significant role in the background of polarized circumstances as the 'prime synthesizer of the old and new'. It represents the desire and efforts of many Muslims to achieve a rapprochement between Islam and modernity that is 'spiritually satisfying as well as politically workable'.<sup>48</sup> His notion of Islamic modernism is characterized by its advocacy of a 'liberal outlook in the interpretation of Islam's message'. Iqbal believed that the efforts of 'liberal Muslims' to 'reinterpret the foundational legal principles in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life' were perfectly justified. For him a return to these earlier principles necessarily involved 'a reinterpretation that would unravel their revealed aspects', and be in keeping with the 'new forces set free by the extraordinary development of human thought in all its directions'.<sup>49</sup> In this sense his orientation has also been described as 'Islamic liberalism' which pursues 'liberal values to seek general Islamic goals of justice and equality'. It emphasizes the importance of 'social justice', and recognizes the importance of 'liberal democratic institutions'. This

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<sup>46</sup> Majeed, Javed, 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Routledge. 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Nickelson, Reynolds. A. *Asrar-e-Khuddi*, Secrets of the Self. 1964.

<sup>48</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad, Stray Reflections. ed Javed Iqbal.

<sup>49</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad, 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'.

'Muslim modernist' approach believes that '*liberal democratic institutions can provide the ideal conditions to meet Islamic goals*'.<sup>50</sup>

Iqbal's is not a 'transient modernism' which tries to adapt the Western secular tradition to the 'fashion of the day'.<sup>51</sup> Therefore for Iqbal it was imperative that '*a people must themselves render their historical experience meaningful; others may not do it for them*'. For Iqbal stressed on the '*irreplaceable singularity of individuality*' and for him originality was a premium because '*borrowed ideas do not have the power to bestow on people the gift and grace of living*'.<sup>52</sup> Through the affirmation of individual Selfhood in his work Iqbal creates a newly discovered sense of 'political agency'. One of Iqbal's greatest achievement was to create a realization of the primacy of the Self in the community of mankind. Selfhood is often represented as a '*storm-ridden dew drop*' in Iqbal's poetry, such as

*Are you a drop of water? Don't dissolve at your feet,  
Surge forward like a wave and wrestle with the sea.*<sup>53</sup>

In this way Iqbal urged the Muslims to free their '*creative imagination*' and in doing so to re-write their own destiny and to '*create a new world order*'. Iqbal wanted to gather together the fragmented splinters of the individuals of the Muslim society a situation which he believed was the result of the 'stagnation of the spirit'. There is constant concern with '*forces of history*' in Iqbal's work, which have led to the historical decline of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Singh, Iqbal. 'The Ardent Pilgrim'. Oxford University Press. 1997

<sup>52</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad, 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'.

<sup>53</sup> Nickelson, Reynolds. A. . *Asrar-e-Khuddi*, Secrets of the Self. 1964.

<sup>54</sup> In many ways, the colonial context was critical to Iqbal's fashioning of an Islamicized agency and Western imperialism provided an opportunity to reconstruct Islam. It is for this reason Iqbal believed that *liberty (ikhtiyar) is born from constraint (jabr)*.<sup>55</sup> For Iqbal the experience of imperialism brought about a sense of renewal and self-consciousness for Muslims, as he puts it, *The storm of the West has made Muslims Muslim*'.<sup>56</sup> Iqbal emphasized the political and religious reconstruction of Self-hood and suggested that the revival of a reinterpreted faith-based Selfhood might 'control the forces of history' and 'restore' Islam's place in the contemporary world.

For Iqbal the religious experience also produced a valuable sense of interiority and gave one 'a capacity to centralize the forces of the ego' and recreate 'a new personality'.<sup>57</sup> The external becomes the internal, representing the potentialities of the poet's own inner space. Iqbal finds peace in his solitude with the creation of 'a spacious interiority' and a sense of deep inwardness or 'within-ness' evoked through images of '*andar nihan*' (inside the within).<sup>58</sup> This consolidated Self then becomes powerful enough to take on the external. For Iqbal such a re-construction of the Self was not only needed to secure the dignity of individual Muslims against the '*dehumanizing ideologies of Western colonialism*' but also against influential strands within Islamic culture which considered the individual to be '*illusory*' and '*marginal*'. In spite of its inspirational and novel perspective, however Iqbal's modernism however did not find practical resonance within his own generation. It is perhaps a reflection of this weary predicament, when he says,

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<sup>54</sup> Asrar-e-Khudi. Secrets of the Self. 1964.

<sup>55</sup> Nickelson, Reynolds. A. *Asrar-e-Khuddi*, Secrets of the Self. 1964.

<sup>56</sup> Khalil, M.A. *Bang-e-Dara*, (Call of The Marching Bells), Tulu-i-Islam. 1924

<sup>57</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad, 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'.

<sup>58</sup> Majeed, Javed. 'Putting God in His Place..' Journal of Islamic Studies. 4, 2, 1993

*I know not where my station,  
I know this, that it is far from friends'.<sup>59</sup>*

In many ways, Iqbal's thought seemed to be ahead of its time. Iqbal seemed to be somehow cognizant that he was writing for the future generations and at various instances he very consciously addressed himself to the youth, urging them '*to stride into the future with pride by reclaiming their past*'.<sup>60</sup> Expressing this in one of his powerful poems titled, 'To the Youth of Islam', he says,

*"O Muslim youth! Have you ever used your prudence,  
What was that sky of which you are a fallen star?"*

### **Conclusion: The Impact of Iqbal's Thought in the Current Context**

The notion of 'Islamic modernism' that Iqbal upholds is important to understand today because it provides meaningful ways to deal with the '*problem of modernity*' in the Muslim world. Iqbal's notion of modernity can also be situated in the context of typologies of 'contemporary Islamic political orientations' which make a distinction between '*traditionalism*', '*secularism*' and '*modernism*'.<sup>61</sup> Islamic '*traditionalism*' can be seen as an orientation that wants to revive the 'original or pristine' view of Islam and wants to rebuild or conserve what it considers to be the 'authentic' Islamic tradition. Islamic '*secularism*' is an orientation that 'wants to cast aside or at least benignly ignore Islam's political teachings'. Muslim 'secularists' aim to preserve and expand already existing secular institutions, frequently employing Western ideologies as a counterweight to

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<sup>59</sup> Arberry, Arthur. J. *Javid Nama*. 1966

<sup>60</sup> Tariq, A.R. 'Speeches and Statements of Iqbal'.

<sup>61</sup> Jawed, Nasim. A. 'Islam's Political Culture.' University of Texas Press. 1999.



Islamic tradition. The Muslim '*modernists*' however seek to accomplish their goal of reforming the Muslim society by taking a middle of the path approach of 'reforming the existing system' through 'intellectual discourse, modern education and legal reform that is based in Islam'.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly the notion of Islamic modernity espoused by Iqbal reflects a 'modernist' outlook. Iqbal rejected secularism and traditionalism and considered modernity to be an effective antidote to these extreme, opposing viewpoints. It is also significant to note that the aspirations of a large majority of Muslims fall within the category of 'modernist' tendencies, which reflects a proclivity towards considerable religiosity while upholding progressive ideals.<sup>63</sup> However such modernism, which has an inclination for 'Islamic liberalism', has never been able to find a voice in the Muslim world.<sup>64</sup> This is not to say that Iqbal's ideals have 'failed' but only that they have not been able to be articulated or understood , meaningfully and comprehensively. This is inspite of the fact that he has been placed on the proverbial pedestal by the Muslims as an 'eminent Muslim thinker'.

One underlying reason for this could be that the idea of modernity itself had wrongly become a connotation of the process of secularism, which is looked down upon in the Muslim world as a Western imposition. This position is seen as a contradiction in terms, because a celebration of modernity translates into irreverence towards tradition and religion by its inadvertant association with secularism. It is generally thus believed

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<sup>62</sup> Jawed, Nasim. A, 'Islam's Political Culture.' University of Texas Press. 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Masud,K. 'Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad'. & Jawed, N. A, 'Islam's Political Culture.'

<sup>64</sup> Masud , Khalid. 'Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad'. Iqbal Academy Pakistan .1995.

that modernization automatically prescribes secularism and 'modernist minorities' in the world are seen as 'advancing' and 'propagating' secularism.<sup>65</sup> This seemingly paradoxical entanglement of modernity with secularization beleaguers the understanding of Iqbal's ideals in the Muslim world and seems to have led to the 'loss' of Iqbal's message, which underlines the fact that it is possible to be religious and modern at the same time.<sup>66</sup>

Another reason for the lack of articulation of such modernism in the Muslim world seems to be that it generally appeals to the middle classes. It was by no coincidence that Nehru had ostracized Iqbal in 1929 for 'corrupting the Muslim middle classes towards separatism'.<sup>67</sup> However by and large this middle class has not yet been able to articulate itself meaningfully or found any significant social or political representation in the postcolonial Muslim world.<sup>68</sup> Consequently the modernist viewpoint is currently eclipsed by the two dominant orientations, the secularist attitude towards Islam upheld by the so called Westernized political elite and the traditionalist outlooks which correlates manifestly with the fundamentalist groups in Muslim societies.

Given this context, in the current times of anarchy, any success in the practical articulation of the modernity inherent in Iqbal's spiritual message can eventually have far-reaching political and social reverberations for the Muslim world. Iqbal's thought is manifestly infused with a powerful global message, a call to action which has yet to be

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<sup>65</sup> Madan, T.N. 'Secularism and its Place.'

<sup>66</sup> Masud, Khalid. 'Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad'. Iqbal Academy Pakistan. 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Majeed, Javed, 'Muhammad Iqbal Islam, Aesthetics and Post-colonialism'. Singh, Iqbal. 'The Ardent Pilgrim'

<sup>68</sup> Jawed, Nasim. A. 'Islam's Political Culture.' University of Texas Press. 1999.

fulfilled, but only time will tell if perhaps Iqbal's lofty vision of his own poetic legacy will finally come true.

*' After me they will read my poetry,*

*grasp it and say,*

*A Self-conscious man has revolutionized the world.'*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Khalil, M.A. .*Bang-e-Dara*, (Call of The Marching Bells). 1924

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